

March 8, 2009

John Baldridge
103 Woodworth Avenue
Missoula, MT 59801

Mr. Jon Sesso, Chair
Appropriations Committee
Montana House of Representatives

Dear Sir,

I write in support of providing additional health care support to Montana's National Guard and Reserve combat veterans. I am a veteran of the Iraq campaign and a Command Sergeant Major currently serving the 379th Engineer Battalion stationed in Ft. Missoula, MT, so I have extensive first-hand experience with this important issue. However, I write as a private citizen. Nothing in this letter represents an official United States Army position.

No Montana Guard or Reserve Soldier who served in either the Iraq or Afghanistan campaigns was unaffected, physically or mentally. Large proportions have Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or a variety of physical ailments. Only a small portion of Montana Soldiers seek assistance from the Veteran's Administration or their chain of command for these problems. Most are proudly independent, self-reliant Montanans who find ways to get by on their own because that is the way Montanans are raised.

Unfortunately, the size of medical costs for Montana's National Guard and Reserve combat veterans has never been higher. National Guard and Reserve Soldiers do not automatically receive health insurance coverage like their active duty counterparts; they pay for their health insurance like civilians. But many are under-covered or without coverage because their job does not offer health care or they cannot afford it.

Legislators can and should help Montana's National Guard and Reserve combat veterans shoulder this burden, even if only in a small way. These Soldiers will not seek assistance on their own, they will quietly continue to do what they see as their duty even if their health care burden is greatly increased.

In challenging economic times Legislators must make tough spending choices. But the war on terror will not stop because of our economic challenges; nor will the returning flow of Montana's National Guard and Reserve combat veterans. Our Soldiers' need is great, and nobody is more deserving of the support this bill offers.

Sincerely,


John Baldridge